

## Book Review

# *Sea Power: The History and Geopolitics of the World's Oceans*

By Admiral James Stavridis

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This book is unique in that it comprises two aspects of the oceans: ‘the personal experience of a mariner at sea’ and ‘the geopolitics of the oceans and how they constantly influence events ashore’. Thus, the author’s contention is the theme of the book — ‘the oceans drive the international system’ (pp. 4-5). The author, Admiral James Stavridis, is a retired US naval officer with substantial experience and knowledge of the world’s oceans and US naval practices; he is also the Dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University.

Considering historic incidents and events, Stavridis’s analysis is based on his personal experiences, especially in an official capacity in the field of geopolitics and maritime security. Therefore, the value of this volume is twofold; it serves as a personal memoir of his navigation as a naval officer and provides a geopolitical perspective of the world’s oceans in terms of American naval strategy. The leitmotif of this book pertains to the geopolitical questions regarding various oceans and seas that emerged during the author’s service as a US naval officer in maritime areas. The answers to the questions, therefore, include a mixture of the author’s personal and practical experiences and his academic knowledge and scholarship.

The volume elaborates on the characteristics and significance of the Pacific Ocean, Atlantic Ocean, Indian Ocean, Mediterranean, South China Sea, Caribbean, and Arctic Ocean, with a chapter devoted to each one. In the last two chapters, Stavridis explores the current issues that the world maritime order must face: (1) crimes in and on the oceans, such as piracy, and (2) US naval strategy to maintain peace and stability of the world’s oceans. The author depicts the size and location of each ocean in comparison with the surface area of the US, giving a real image of the vast maritime space of an ocean to the reader by referring to the names of cities and geographical features of

the country. In the book, the author proposes a national strategy and concrete plan for US foreign policy about the world's major maritime areas mentioned above. In addition, every chapter in the book contains two sets of thematically contrasting maps — old and current— depicting land and sea elevations and fisheries, with geopolitical and cartographic connotations.

In the twenty-first century —the Age of the Pacific—, the Pacific Ocean (Chapter 1), where the arms race is real and dangerous, has a smaller risk of clashes between China and a US-led bloc of nations than in the Cold War era (despite some challenges and tensions in the South China Sea and Korean Peninsula), if and when a mechanism to put transparency, cooperation, and diplomacy in place functions.

The Atlantic Ocean (Chapter 2), as the world's second largest ocean after the Pacific, is rich in the history of the Vikings, the Age of Great Navigation, the New World Exchange, the American Revolution, the Napoleonic Wars, the First and Second World Wars, and the Cold War, and has been a zone of real conflicts between the US and European nations. This scenario is attributed to maritime technological transformations (e.g. shipbuilding techniques and telegraph cables). Now, there is a zone of cooperation and peace extending from the Arctic to the Antarctic Ocean.

The Indian Ocean (Chapter 3) has been characterised primarily as zone of trade (notorious for slavery and piracy), with less geopolitical significance and history; it contains the Arabian Gulf and Red Sea as the inland seas connecting the West and the Islamic world. After the British departure from the South Asian subcontinent after the Second World War, the Indian Ocean incurred the greatest risk of danger from confrontations between India and Pakistan over nuclear weapons. Therefore, the US will need to play a more important role in the Indian Ocean in this century in light of the geopolitically critical factors in this region, such as the rise of India, the fault line between the Sunni and Shi'a worlds, and counterpiracy operations.

Historically, the Mediterranean Sea (Chapter 4) — both a cradle of Greek, Roman, and Christian civilisations and an unforgiving arena of war at sea — will continue to be a sea of conflict because of its geopolitical conditions, represented by Russia's resurgence in the Black Sea, the flow of refugees through the Balkans and Turkey, and the threat from Libya to Italy, or the 'soft underbelly of Europe' (Winston Churchill). Stavridis stresses the collaborative operations of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the United States in the Mediterranean region to diminish threats from the Islamic State and the flow of illegal migrants and refugees.

Since the arms race in East Asia continues to raise tensions in the South China Sea (Chapter 5), a highway and sea lane for world trade, the international community will need to encourage military-to-military direct contact, hold governmental conferences as well as foster private sector engagement, promote collaborative operations of noncombat operations, and utilise negotiating platforms for the settlement of territorial disputes. The United States must retain a presence in the area through a network of bases and access agreements in the littoral states and consider the South

China Sea as a crucial zone of maritime activity in order to confront a rising China, if necessary.

In the Caribbean Sea (Chapter 6), where a natural 'tropical silk road' connects all economies and a tourist industry with Europe despite the overhang of colonialism, the United States must pursue a strategy for fighting corruption and violence in the region, bearing American responsibilities originating the Monroe Doctrine and cooperating with regional partners, organisations, and the private sector.

Regarding the Arctic Ocean (Chapter 7), its future may be as a zone of cooperation (best), a zone of competition (probable), or a zone of real conflict (possible but less likely); therefore, the United States, by taking an interagency approach and building more icebreakers, needs to remain a leader collaborating with NATO and enhancing the dialogue with Russia on commercial and navigational issues.

In the 'Outlaw Sea' (Chapter 8), a destructed maritime situation caused by significant challenges, such as illicit activities (e.g. piracy and overfishing) and environmental damage (e.g. climate change, oil pollution, and resource exploitation), the United States is ought to enhance the level of international maritime cooperation through domestic (interagency) coordination in public and private sectors and intergovernmental collaboration (e.g. United Nations organisations) under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

In the final chapter, the author proposes a naval strategy for America in the twenty-first century, following and modifying the basic theory of Rear Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan that national power derives from engagement via the world's oceans along the three key vectors of a state (production, shipping, and colonies and alliances) and some principal conditions (geography, actual size of the seacoasts, nautical characteristics of the nation, and the character of government). As a maritime nation, the United States depends heavily on the open flow of free goods in the oceans as open 'global commons' and needs a strong network of alliances and partnerships globally, accompanied by a high level of private-public operational integration and cooperation. On the basis of the analysis made in previous chapters regarding the world's oceans, the author specifically stresses the need for updating and implementing a national maritime strategy and providing a roadmap for the maintenance of national security and assurance of all-domain access (air, sea, land, space, and cyberspace domains) throughout the entire world.

The book under review, reflecting a US maritime strategy from the author's viewpoint, is, to a certain degree, updated by covering some outstanding current local issues such as China's maritime expansionism, North Korea's nuclear missile programmes, and other global challenges, such as piracy and environmental damage. Despite its unorthodox style for a monograph in this field (i.e. with scant footnotes and relatively thin academic references), Stavridis's personal experience as a naval officer—under the strong and deep inspiration of Mahan's seminal work on the notion of sea power—vividly re-evaluates the traditional American idea of the 'island state' in the context

of the current geopolitical and geostrategic contexts.

US Freedom of Navigation Operations are, for Stavridis, necessary measures allowed under the law of the sea to cope with China's rise and unilateral claim in the Pacific Ocean, whereas international cooperation in anti-piracy measures taken against Somali pirates is within the realm of conventional maritime order historically arising from common interests. The theme and conclusion of Stavridis is balanced and consistent: considering its own geopolitical conditions and those of the world's oceans, the United States must remain a sea power with a maritime strategy and cooperate with its allies and partners. As the Obama administration unequivocally admitted, the United States no longer polices the world; nowadays, it demands international cooperation for the maintenance and stability of the current maritime order, regardless of President Donald Trump's theme of 'America First'.

In addition, Stavridis's support of the early accession of the US to UNCLOS will certainly be echoed by others for enhancement of the law-abiding posture of the nation in favour of the Rule of Law, which is firmly shared by developed states, particularly when the United States criticises any maritime expansionist acts of China (e.g. in and around the South China Sea). Stavridis misleadingly states that UNCLOS 'came largely into force in the 1980s' (p. 186), but its official entry took place on 16 November 1994 because the deep seabed regime under UNCLOS was disputed principally by major developed states, including the United States. Under these circumstances, the United States would not enjoy the rights and privileges pertaining to such special regimes, including deep seabed management, the continental shelf regime, and the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea. Even though US maritime policy and strategy may be inevitably based on customary law, its non-party status with regard to UNCLOS will certainly hinder its holistic approach to maritime issues under Stavridis's siren, 'the sea is one'. Thus, this book serves as a warning against a self-centred maritime strategy by the United States with its unilateral and arbitral implementation.

It is also noteworthy to mention that Stavridis's American approach to a geopolitical analysis and historic consideration of maritime powers may contrastively lure still thirsty readers to a British style of doctrinal classification and historic examination, possibly represented by Geoffrey Till's *Seapower: A Guide for the Twenty-First Century* (Third Edition, Routledge, 2013) and Jeremy Black's *Naval Power: A History of Warfare and the Sea from 1500* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), respectively. When Mahan wrote his *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History 1660-1783* (1890), *Pax Americana* started to take over *Pax Britannica*.